

History and Context



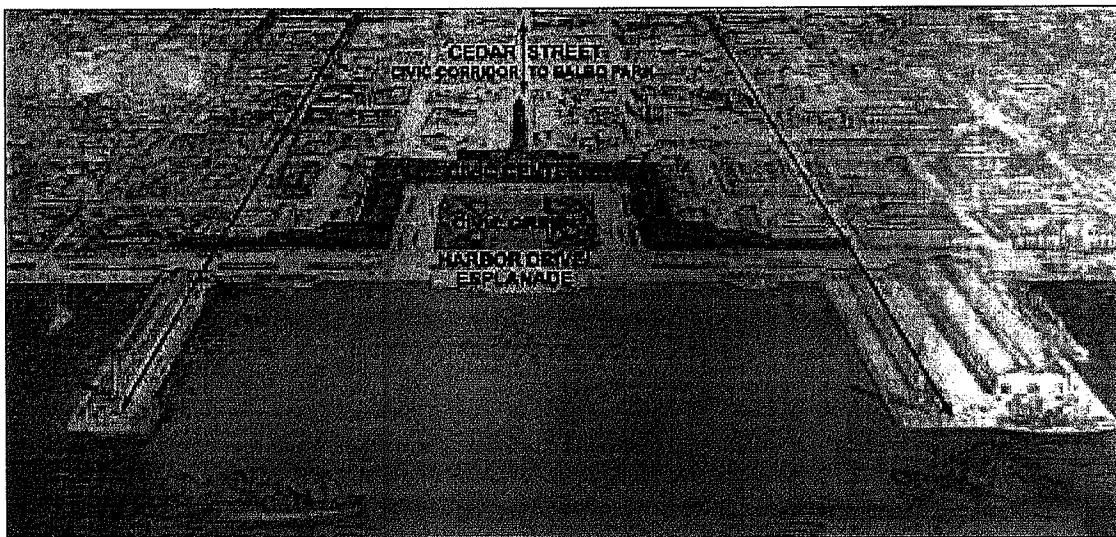
1. 1937 Photograph of Partially Filled CAC Site

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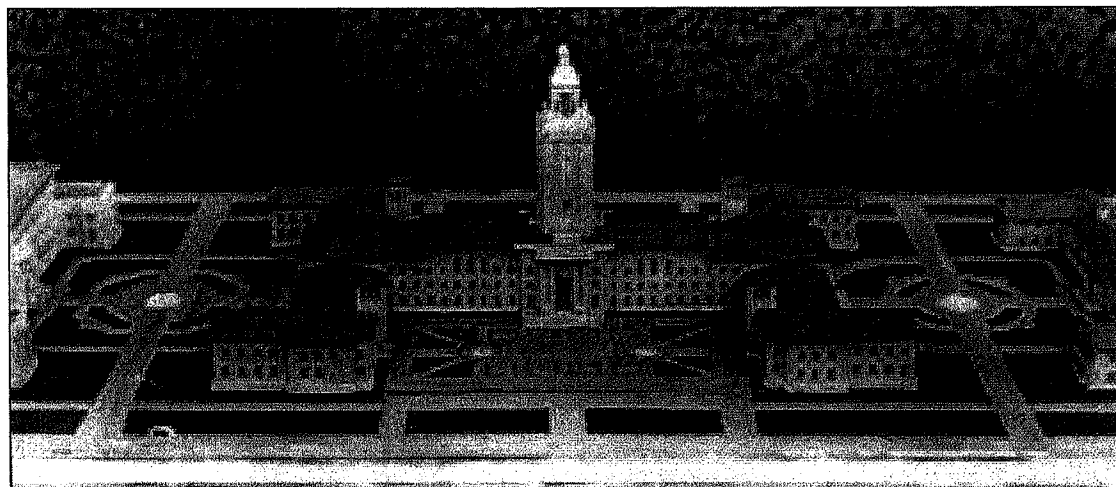
* The Need for a Civic Center

The vision of a large civic center in San Diego was introduced as early as 1902 when space for City and County offices was deficient at City Hall. Citizen activist groups led by George Marston funded the planning and encouraged the political support that eventually led to the civic center's construction. A major step for San Diego and its civic center was the 1908 Nolen Plan. At that time, the project did not gather widespread public support. The First World War further hindered planning efforts.

At the time of the original Nolen Plan, the eventual site of the County Administrative Center was still under water. Funds were made available for dredging in 1911 and the current location of the building became suitable for construction by 1914.



2. Drawing based on the Nolen Plan (with color overlay by Hargreaves Associates)



3. 1935 Model, Requa, Gill, Johnson Architects

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* Realization of the Dream

In 1923, the Nolen Plan was reconsidered at George Marston's urging. In 1926, planner John Nolen restated the need for a civic center, and the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution in support of the project. Nolen's report recommended the formerly tidal site between Pacific Highway and Harbor Drive as the site for the Civic Center. Nolen proposed that the Civic Center become the "cornerstone of Public Buildings on the San Diego waterfront. The center would serve as the western anchor point of a grand promenade that would link the bay with Balboa Park.

Funding for the building was secured from the federal government after President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited the site in 1935. In 1934, San Diego architects William Templeton Johnson, Richard S. Requa, and Louis J. Gill were selected to design the building. Illness on the part of Johnson, a commitment to the 1935 World's Fair Exposition on the part of Requa, and Gill's desire to manage bookkeeping for the office led to the selection of Samuel Hamill to lead the project design team.

The architects designed a building combining Spanish Renaissance and modernist design. The 'H' shaped plan enclosed two formal gardens rooms on the west and east of the building, while two other proposed buildings (never constructed) flanking the north and south, creating rectilinear gardens. The overall effect was that of a grand building rising from a series of carefully planned garden rooms. The Civic Center broke ground in December 1935 and was completed by 1938.

* Historic Landscape

In 1938 landscape architect Roland Hoyt was hired to oversee the completion of the landscape. It was completed at a cost of \$129,944. The design of the landscape was to complement the building with a symmetrical path system and amorphous border planting beds filled with a broad spectrum of plants suited to San Diego's unique climate. A Mediterranean style garden, composed of a large paved terrace punctuated by fountains and surrounded by trees and low plantings, was created between the two east wings of the building. Washingtonia Palms were used extensively west of the building and Senegal Palms dotted the open expanse of lawn fronting Harbor Drive. The original plans for gardens in the large areas at the north and south of the site were never completed. Large parking lots eventually filled much of this space.

This landscape has evolved over time. During World War II, vegetables were grown in the planting beds and donated to charity. The County built the Askew Building in 1958 as a temporary structure. The building remains today, but will be demolished to make way for the new park. In 1984, the County installed a xeriscape garden, with arid adapted plants to demonstrate water conservation.

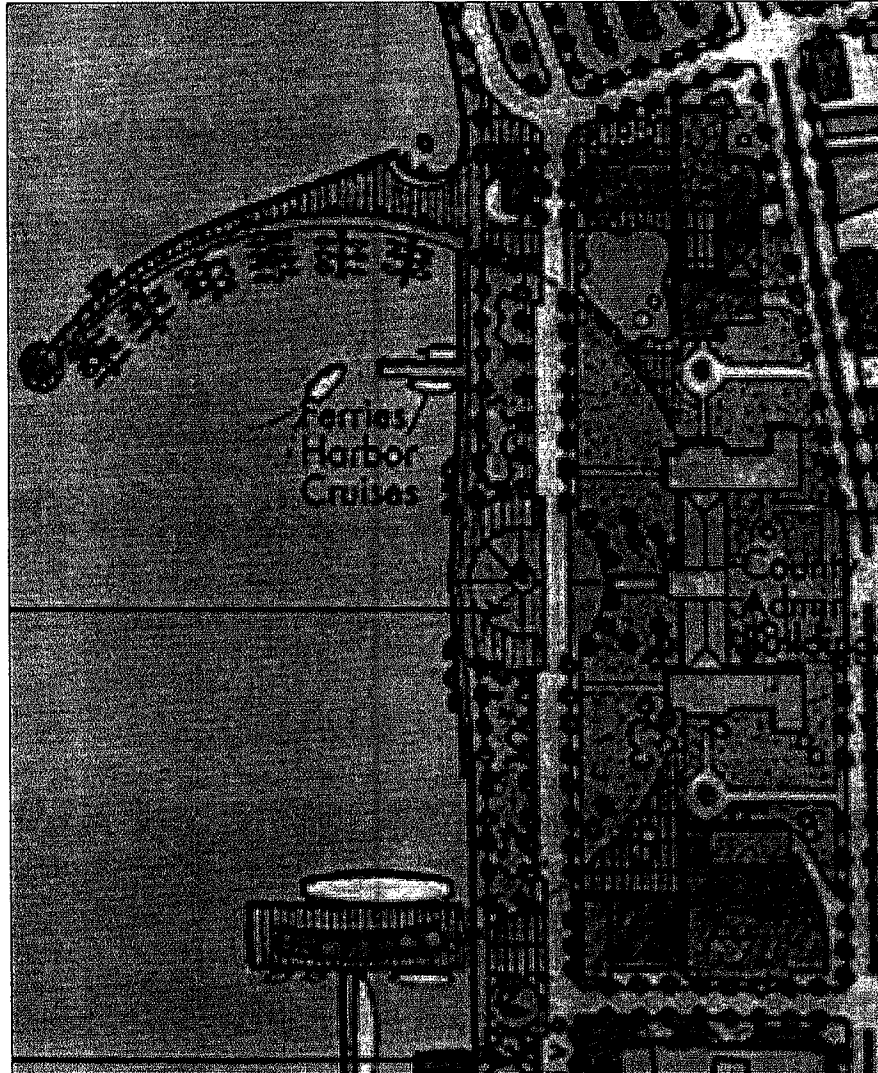
• History of the CAC site paraphrased from *Bridging the Centuries: The Jewel on the Bay, A History Commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the County Administration Center, 1938-1998*

The North Embarcadero Alliance Visionary Plan

The 1998 North Embarcadero Alliance Visionary Plan was instrumental in establishing a common series of guidelines, goals and objectives for development of the North Embarcadero. The Plan was the result of an unprecedented cooperative planning effort between the five agencies comprising the North Embarcadero Alliance: the Centre City Development Corporation, the City of San Diego, the County of San Diego, the San Diego Unified Port District, and the United States Navy. The North Embarcadero area is bounded by Hawthorn Street on the north, the railroad right of way to the east, Market Street to the south and the bulkhead line of San Diego bay to the west. The following is a summary of some of the Visionary Plan's fundamental goals that effect the planning and design of CAC Waterfront Park:

- Establish the North Embarcadero as a public precinct and front porch to the whole community, creating attractions that draw people to the bayfront
- Establish the North Embarcadero as an active, vibrant area, particularly along the bayfront
- Encourage development that is economically viable and increase the economic and social vitality of the bayfront
- Provide for uses and amenities that celebrate the San Diego community
- Preserve, enhance, and celebrate the area's marine uses, architecture, art, and culture
- Make the bayfront accessible to all, including those with disabilities - on foot, bicycle, boat, transit, auto

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4. North Embarcadero Alliance Visionary Plan, 1998 Sasaki Associates

These general goals stated in the North Embarcadero Alliance Visionary Plan provided a starting point for this Master Plan and were given great consideration throughout the planning process. The Visionary Plan had many specific planning and design recommendations impacting the proposed CAC Waterfront Park. The image at left is from that document.

The most significant departure from the Visionary Plan recommendations has been a shift in emphasis to favor the creation of open park space, as opposed to the combination of development and open space specified in the North Embarcadero Alliance Visionary Plan. The surface of the CAC site will be almost exclusively park space, although large parking structures will be built below-grade.

As outlined in the Visionary Plan, the waterfront to the east of the CAC Park should be as open and accessible as possible, with strong connections between the Park and waterfront. In agreement with the approved Visionary Plan, a crescent-shaped Grape Street Pier is shown in the plan. The master plan also envisions a connection between the park and the new esplanade envisioned in the North Embarcadero Plan.

The general tenets of the North Embarcadero Alliance Visionary Plan will continue to provide input to this project in subsequent design phases as well as providing a framework for coordination between this project and the concurrent North Embarcadero Project.

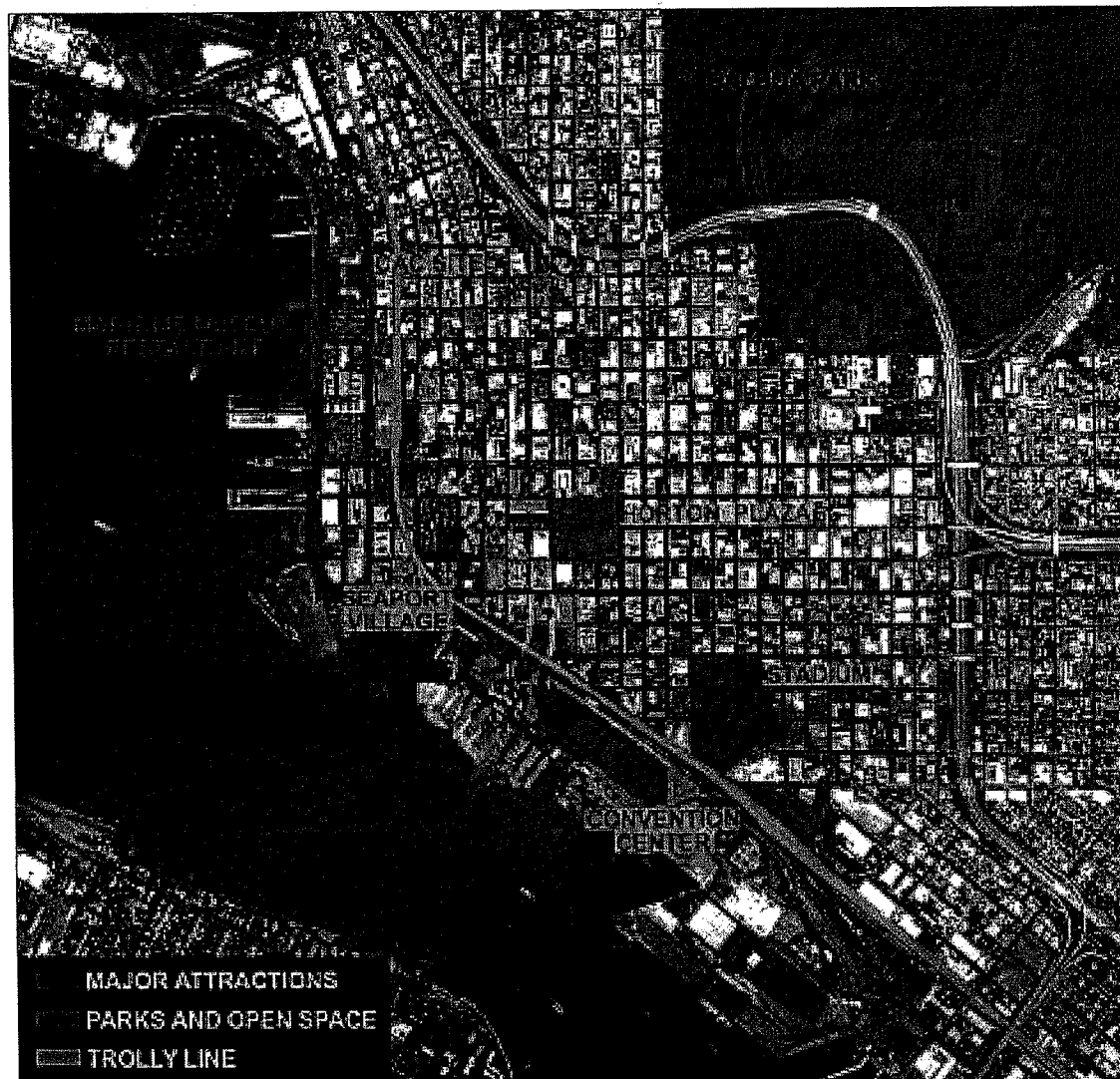
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The CAC Site within San Diego

The County Administration Center Site lies northwest of downtown San Diego and south of the San Diego airport within a region of the city known as the North Embarcadero. The North Embarcadero is an area that is currently undergoing a renaissance. Adjacent neighborhoods, including Little Italy, are rapidly transforming in response to the residential influx into downtown San Diego.

The most remarkable contextual feature of the County Administration Center site is its location on San Diego Bay. A broad look at the County Administration Center site within its metropolitan context reveals the site's importance. Along this crowded commercial and industrial waterfront, typical of a large port city, exists an unexploited void, a potential. An area that is now dominated by parking lots has the potential to become a landmark San Diego park. As the keystone open space of the larger North Embarcadero Project and the largest potential waterfront park in downtown San Diego, the successful transformation of this site to parkland is particularly important.

The diagram (right) highlights downtown San Diego's major attractions (red) and existing open spaces (green). The CAC Waterfront Park will be both an open space and a major attraction, extending the high level of activity that currently exists downtown and in portions of the South Embarcadero into the North Embarcadero.



5. Aerial Photograph of San Diego with CAC Project Boundary Outlined in Red

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Site and Beyond

The County Administration Center Site is bordered by Grape Street on the north, Ash Street on the south, Pacific Highway on the east, and Harbor Drive on the west.

The CAC Waterfront Park Master Plan focuses primarily on planning and design investigations within the site area, outlined in red on the diagram at left. This is the extent of the County of San Diego property on this site. Many of the diagrams, models and drawings in this document extend beyond these limits. Off-site areas and issues that were examined at a planning level of detail include the Cedar/Kettner Development, connections to adjacent neighborhoods, Pacific Highway, Harbor Drive, and the Waterfront. Creating strong connections to these surrounding elements is crucial to the long term success of the CAC Waterfront Park. Subsequent phases of this project will increasingly focus on the design of the area within the specific property line.



6. CAC Site Boundary



7. Photograph of CAC Building and South Parking Lot